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Missourians Show Support for Proposed Safety Belt Legislation ***House Transportation Committee Passes House Bill 90***

JEFFERSON CITY - Safety supporters rallied today at the state Capitol in support of a primary safety belt law after the House Transportation Committee passed House Bill 90. The bill, which changes Missouri's current safety belt law to allow primary enforcement, will now go to the entire House for consideration. Witnesses testified about personal experiences that led them to support the legislation. After the hearing, a press conference featured Rep. Neal St. Onge, the legislation's sponsor, and several of the witnesses.

"We want to give law enforcement the chance to enforce the law that is already on the books," St. Onge said. "It can and will keep people from dying in traffic crashes."

The hearing was the first opportunity for citizens to voice their support for the legislation to their legislators. Matthew Cushman, a paramedic and director of the Emergency Medical Services for the city of Raytown, Mo., has been at the scene of many crashes and was himself involved in a near-fatal crash.

"There is no way I would be here today...and be able to care for the thousands of people in my community without the simple concept of fastening my seat belt," Cushman said.

In 2006, 70 percent of the 1,089* people who died in traffic crashes were not wearing their seat belts. "A primary seat belt law has the greatest potential of any piece of legislation for saving up to 90 lives," said MoDOT Director Pete Rahn. "Each of you who help to enact this bill will know that with every year that passes, you have saved another 90 lives."

Others who testified spoke in the order in which they are affected when a traffic crash occurs -- from the first emergency responders to law enforcement officials, emergency hospital personnel, survivors, funeral directors, clergy and finally victims' families and friends.



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The hearing was the first key step in the legislative process for getting primary safety belt legislation to pass. The Missouri Coalition for Roadway Safety is planning a Primary Safety Belt Rally when the legislation is to be voted on by the House following floor debates.

Wearing a seat belt is the most effective way to reduce injuries and fatalities in a crash because it provides protection from being ejected and keeps motorists from smashing into windshields, dashboards and other passengers. Missouri's current law requires front-seat passengers to buckle up, but a citation can only be issued if the traffic officer makes a stop for another violation (secondary enforcement). A primary seat belt law will allow an officer to stop a vehicle if he/she observes the safety belt violation. Of the more than 500 other Missouri traffic laws, all are enforced as primary laws.

For more information or to show your support, visit www.saveMOLives.com.

*This number is approximate, it could increase when all reports are complete.